



**NATIONAL
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE
ADVISORY COUNCIL**



August 14, 2001

Dear Environmental Justice Allies,
Dear Environmental Justice Stakeholders, and
Dear EPA Colleagues:

Last week, from August 8-10, the NEJAC Executive Council met in Washington, D.C., to (1) strategically review its mission, operating procedures, and output, and to (2) clarify ambiguities and misunderstandings that have arisen over the years about NEJAC's mission and relationship with the EPA. Discussion and evaluation of these issues became necessary because of the maturing of the NEJAC and because of the need for the NEJAC, going into the future, to retain its effectiveness in shaping and informing environmental policy for impacted communities here and abroad.

The thorough and honest dialogue that occurred at the meeting among the NEJAC members and with its colleagues at EPA's Office of Environmental Justice clarified a number of issues and re-affirmed a shared vision about its fundamental mission and goals. In doing so, it also became clear that the meeting was only the first step of an ongoing process to improve the effectiveness of the NEJAC's work and that much further work would be necessary to translate the consensus into concrete outcomes. Nevertheless, the progress that was made at the meeting was very encouraging:

- * Even though a diverse group of stakeholders is represented on the NEJAC, there was consensus on the NEJAC's mission, charter, and willingness to collaborate with the EPA on increasing the effectiveness of our policy recommendations.
- * We found agreement on the need to (1) identify new ways to improve the effective participation of impacted community residents who are of color or poor, and (2) to improve articulation of their site-specific community concerns into broad policy recommendations for EPA.
- * We were encouraged by EPA Administrator Christine Todd Whitman's memorandum to senior staff on EPA's Commitment To Environmental Justice, issued on August 9, 2001, expressing its firm commitment to integrating environmental justice into EPA programs, policies, and activities. This commitment will be crucial to the future effectiveness of the NEJAC. (For the complete memorandum, see attachment.)

A Federal Advisory Committee to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

* We will develop a Strategic Work Plan over the coming weeks to create a process for identifying key policy issues and articulating an operational vision and issue agenda through which the views of impacted communities can be incorporated and through which all stakeholders can be involved in a deliberative dialogue to achieve these goals.

The Strategic Work Plan Group, chaired by Peggy Shepard, NEJAC Chair, and Annabelle Jaramillo, Chair, NEJAC Air & Water Subcommittee, includes members of the Executive Council who will reach out to subcommittee members and former NEJAC members for their input into this plan which will guide the NEJAC's work over the upcoming years.

Sincerely,

Peggy Shepard

Peggy Shepard
Chair

cc: NEJAC Executive Council
NEJAC Subcommittee Members
NEJAC Designated Federal Officers